



State of Connecticut

SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE
JAMES A. AMANN

EDUCATION COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING
Monday, March 10, 2008
Testimony in SUPPORT of HB 5869
An Act Agriculture Science and Technology

Speaker Amann (118th District- Milford) strongly supports increasing the State's commitment to Agricultural Science education by relieving budget pressures on sending towns through the creation of a transportation reimbursement grant, and expanding the opportunity of choice to high school students seeking to pursue such academically successful programs.

Good afternoon, Representative Fleischmann, Senator Gaffey, and members of the Education Committee. Thank you very much for raising **HB 5869 An Act Concerning Agriculture Science and Technology**. Over the last two years, we have learned about the well-kept secret of Agricultural Science and Technology programs in several of our high schools. Moreover, we have all been wowed by the talented Ag. students, their potential and their achievements. I applaud this Committee for its strong support and efforts to enhance agricultural education.

However, the challenge remains to adequately fund our "original" magnet schools so they can continue to provide such substantive educational opportunities to students. Last year's increase in funding was a first step forward, and this year, in tighter budget times, our request is again just for incremental financial support.

When we look for successful models in high school education, one we can no longer afford to overlook is the Agricultural Science model. It is preparing students for excellence in college and to fill the job openings in many of Connecticut's workforce shortage areas. In addition, Connecticut's Agricultural Science programs are the gateway for many high school students to work in the biotechnology field; an area we hope will become one of Connecticut's signature industries thanks to our initiative to enhance the nanotechnology field.

Having met personally with Ag. students and visited their schools, I am very encouraged by the goals of HB 5869. Connecticut has already invested heavily in the construction of advanced facilities, and this legislation further capitalizes on this investment. It promotes the continued participation of sending districts to enroll students in Ag. programs in two ways. First, utilizing the model of Connecticut's other magnet schools, HB 5869 rewards rather than penalizes sending districts for providing this valuable educational opportunity through a transportation reimbursement grant. Last year the General Assembly increased funding to agricultural science centers, but the tuition charged to sending districts was also raised. This transportation grant will ease this new cost burden, and demonstrate our renewed commitment to a program that exemplifies the high quality education we want to promote around our state. Second, the legislation clarifies a quirk in the law that prevented sending district students from having the opportunity to enroll in such outstanding programs.

I believe that the General Assembly must act again this year to continue to enhance a program that raises student achievement and encourages our students' to be passionate about their chosen studies. Thank you very much for your time today and consideration of transportation grants for agricultural education and the legal clarification needed to maintain this educational opportunity to students through the state. This is an excellent opportunity to improve access to quality Agricultural Science education that we cannot afford to pass up.